



The Peer Education and Emergency Response for Mental Health Act

We are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis, with an alarming [76 percent of public schools](#) reporting concerns about depression, anxiety, and trauma in students since the start of the pandemic. Kids and teens report feeling overwhelmed by their peers' mental health crises. Our youth should be empowered to support their peers through mental health emergencies without it adding to their own sense of unease.

Rep. Balint's **Peer Education and Emergency Response for Mental Health Act (PEER Mental Health Act)** allows for students, teachers, and others to participate in training that enables them to assist students in crisis by giving them the tools they need to respond safely.

Mental health first aid training is an evidence-based investment in our communities. By directly focusing on training those on the front lines of this crisis – young people, we can better serve them. Just like we teach students how to respond to a fire or conduct CPR, everyone should know how to respond to a peer experiencing a mental health emergency. Mental health first aid training teaches participants the basic signs of both long-term mental illness and immediate mental health emergencies.

This legislation will award grants to train teachers, school personnel, parents/caregivers and students in mental health first aid to:

- Recognize symptoms of mental health disorders in children in adolescents
- Refer participants to necessary mental health treatment
- Identify signs of immediate mental distress (such as a panic attack) and, upon recognizing such signs apply mental health first aid tactics
- Educate participants on the resources that are available in the community for individuals with a mental illness.

Additionally, this bill streamlines the application process so that public schools and state and local education agencies with limited personnel and resources can easily apply. This bill authorizes \$24,963,000 for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2028, which complements the current Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Mental Health First Aid grant program.

Mental health first aid is one tool in the toolbox to combat this crisis among teens and kids. The Peer Education and Emergency Response for Mental Health Act works to ensure that students are trained and ready to assist their peers in a mental health crisis. When young people are trained to help one another, it leads to healthier and safer communities.

The bill is endorsed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the National Education Association (NEA), and the National Council on Mental Wellbeing.